

Solomon as the 'son of God'

There can be no doubt that the Deuteronomist envisaged the fulfilment of the covenant promises in a 'human' descendant of David. In the first instance this descendant or 'Son of God' was Solomon:

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son." (2 Sam.7: 14)

There is of course a qualitative *and* quantitative difference between the 'sonship' of Jesus and that of Solomon, nevertheless, the Davidic covenant model has Solomon as the first realization. This poses a problem because of Solomon's apostasy towards the end of his reign. It is however often argued that Solomon repented before he died with the book of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs often cited as supportive evidence¹ and Jesus' supposedly positive mention of Solomon in the NT.

Did Solomon repent?

If we limit our investigation solely to the historical chronicles the conclusion must be that Solomon did not repent. On other occasions when the kings of Judah sinned it is clearly stated that they repented, or that they were acceptable to Yahweh:

¹ It is beyond the remit of this article to investigate the authorship of Songs and Ecclesiastes conventionally attributed to Solomon. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these attributions are late and have more to do with the Jewish desire to legitimize the canonization process rather than establishing authorship. Often they rest on nothing more than the mention of Solomon in the text or incidental contacts with his reign. A strong case can be made for non-Solomonic authorship of these books.

“Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD *was* God”. (2 Chron 33:12-13)

Solomon’s father David is a good example of finding acceptance despite having sinned (but then we know that David repented):

“Nevertheless for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem; because David did *what was* right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite”.(1 Kgs 15:5)

The assessment at the end of Solomon’s reign is negative and it is found in 1 Kings 11:9;

“So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice”

Solomon loved many strange women

Solomon used polygamy as a deliberate tool of statesmanship. From a human perspective such a policy was astute as marrying into the dynasties of the surrounding Kings would ensure stability and peace for his kingdom. However, compromise always comes at a price and the political policy that he pursued would need to be cemented with covenant agreements, including the “freedom of worship” thus enabling the foreign wives that he acquired to import their cults into Israel. Inevitably, the triumph of human reason over divine wisdom led to the

downfall of Solomon. Solomon was in fact doing what the nation (God’s firstborn son) had been explicitly warned not to do – intermarry and make covenants with the surrounding nations (Deut 7:3-6).

The sons of God and the daughters of men

A tabular comparison of corresponding Genesis motifs, demonstrates an undeniable connection:

Genesis	Solomon
Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Gen.1:26)	I will be his father and he shall be my son (2 Sam. 7: 14)
Tree of the knowledge of Good and evil. Ye shall be as Elohim knowing good and evil (Gen.3: 5)	Wisdom— Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil(1 Kgs. 3: 9)
The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. (Gen.6:2)	Solomon loved many strange women (1Kgs.11:1)
Namaah (Gen.4:22; the daughter of Lamech)	Namaah (1 Kgs.14: 21; the mother of Rehoboam)

The Genesis account is referring to ‘divine’ kingship, where the king acts as God’s agent. Of particular interest are the ‘knowledge of good and evil’ motif, and the mention of Namaah (which is not a coincidence). The acquisition of the ‘knowledge of good and evil’ is initially what made Adam (God’s “son”) god-like (like the *elohim*). This “knowledge” is associated in the Old Testament with passing judgement ² and therefore also has correspondences with the heavenly ‘divine council’ whose primary function is to implement righteous judgement. David was likened to the angel ³ of God in his function as judge – his insight was recognised as the product of divine guidance not of human reasoning:

² W.J. Dumbrell comments: “The phrase ‘knowledge of good and evil’ is better taken, following W.M. Clark as referring to the exercise of absolute moral autonomy, a prerogative which the Bible reserves to God alone. Clark is able to illustrate the point from a wide range of Old Testament contexts. Solomon, for example, prays (1 Kgs.3:9) for an understanding heart to govern his people that he ‘may discern between good and evil’. This is an absolute for the task before which he is placed, since he continues in the text “for who is able to govern this thy great people?” The latter half of the same chapter offers a parade example of Solomon’s judicial wisdom, and when Israel acknowledges the astuteness with which the matter of disputed motherhood of the child has been resolved, they perceive that ‘the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice’ (1 Kgs.3:28). What is clear from this passage is that final authoritative decisions of this nature, which affect the whole shape of life, require the mind of God. For the human being, wisdom of this character is derivative, not natural. It must be sought from God and its source must be acknowledged. W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, Paternoster Press, 1984, pp. 36 – 39; W. M. Clark , A Legal Background to the Yahwist’s Use of “Good and Evil” in Gen.2-3 *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 266- On the general relationship of Gen.2:4-3:24 and the view that sin was an attack upon and a breach of the harmony of the created order cf. also Jerome T. Walsh, ‘Gen.2:4b-3:24 A Synchronic Approach’, *JBL* 96 (1977) PP. 161 – 177.

³ The text refers to an angel [*mal’âk*] and not to *elohim* but the Hebrews (unlike the Canaanites) did not differentiate the terms (or the functions) as they are interchangeable. There is a heavenly hierarchy but it is not one of ‘gods’ and ‘angels.’ The hierarchy is one of the chief angel (who bore the Yahweh name and is referred to as ‘Yahweh’) and his subordinates who had specific administrations (such as Michael). The Cherubim (and Seraphim) are depictions of the divine throne and stand as a metaphor for the manifestation of God’s glory in his creation.

“For as an (the) angel [*mal’âk*] of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the Lord thy **God will be with thee** [cf. Emmanuel]” (2 Sam.14: 17)

The Genesis account (4:23-25) has Lamech usurping the prerogative of ‘discerning good and evil’ and boasting that his own judgement on wrongdoers will be 77⁴ times more severe (without mercy) than God’s. The insertion of the Lamech poem at this point in the Genesis narrative and his boast to his wives comes directly after the mention (v.22) of Lamech’s daughter Naamah (pleasant one):

“The Sons of God saw the daughters of men that they **were fair**; [*towb*] and they **took** [*laqach*] **them** wives of all which they chose” (Gen.6: 2)⁵

The Lamech poem is not an independent literary unit inserted randomly in the narrative - nor is the mention of Naamah coincidental, rather it is imperative to understanding the ‘Sons of God’ incident. Lamech was the first polygamist, thus breaking the divine wish for man to be a monogamous creature. He is also found boasting to his wives of passing judgment and avenging himself because a young man had hurt (dishonoured) him. He was proud of his disproportionate response. What had this young man done? The context implies that he had dishonoured

⁴ The Septuagint version has 70x7

⁵ The Hebrew *towb* [translated as ‘fair’ in Gen.6: 2] carries a similar meaning to the name of Lamech’s daughter Naamah. It is used 6 times in the creation narrative of chapter one in the formulaic “God saw that it was good (*towb*)” it is also used for the “tree of the knowledge of good (*towb*) and evil” and for Eve’s temptation; “the woman saw that it was good (*towb*) for food.” It is fitting that the same formulaic expression is used by the “Sons of God”; “[they] saw the daughters of men that they were good (*towb*).” God had declared that it was “not good (*towb*)” that man should be alone and that he should have a partner –but now the “Sons of God” are using coercion to fulfil their lusts. The use of the formulaic expression suggests that this is an inversion of the creative act.

Lamech by **taking his daughter** – which explains the mention of her name (the mention of females in a generation list is a very unusual feature)⁶ and also why he addressed his warning poem **to his wives**. The forcible recruitment of female concubines to the royal harem was a common practice in the A.N.E. witness the problem that Abraham had with Sarah and Isaac with Rebecca. David J. A. Clines discusses this option in his article on the Sons of God Episode: “The ‘sons of God’ are dynastic rulers who, as oriental despots, established royal harems by force or practised indiscriminate rape. This view has the merit of taking seriously the phrase ‘and they took for themselves wives from all whom they chose’. It also makes intelligible the divine punishment upon humanity as a whole because of the sin of these despots; for in oriental ideology it is not uncommon for the fate of the people at large bound up with the fate of the king.”⁷

⁶ Robert Alter comments as follows: “Naamah – One might expect an identification that would align Naamah with her siblings as a founder of some basic activity of human culture, but if such an identification was part of the original epic role call, it has either been lost or deleted. The Midrash recognized that the root of her name can refer to song: perhaps Naamah is meant to be associated with her half brother Jubal, the founder of instrumental music –he as accompanist, she as singer.” [Robert Alter, *Genesis*, Translation and commentary,(New York London,1996)] The Midrashic explanation is unlikely and probably owes its existence to the root carrying the general meaning of ‘pleasant’ (in a sensory sense) and therefore apt to describe musical instruments. Samuel Meier explains: “The term that focuses on the intrinsic appeal of an object to observers surfaces in personal names for males and females, both Israelite and non-Israelite (Naomi in Ruth 1:2, Naaman in 2 Kgs.5: 1, Naam in 1 Chron. 4:15, Naamah in 1 Kgs. 14:21). It is difficult to determine in such names where a divine element is lacking whether the pleasant quality refers to a deity or to the individual who bears the name....But also sounds that are pleasing to hear: the lyre is described as *nā ‘im* and so particularly appropriate to praising Yahweh.” [NIDOTTE 5838 p.121 Samuel A. Meier]

⁷ Clines adds the following footnote references in support of this view; “So Kline, ‘Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4’, pp. 187-204; followed by A.R. Millard, ‘A New Babylonian “Genesis” Story (Epic of Atrahasis)’, *TynBul* 18 (1967), pp. 3-18 (12). Similarly also Ferdinand Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintput? Versuch eines Neuverständnisses von Genesis 6, 2-4 unter Berücksichtigung der religionsvergleichenden und exegetischen Methode*

The parallels between Solomon's reign and Genesis are not coincidental: Solomon committed polygamy (like Lamech) married an Ammonite woman with a similar name to Lamech's daughter (because she was fair?) and therefore Solomon sinned like the sons of God in Genesis. Furthermore Solomon fulfilled all the negative stereotypes of monarchism that the Deuteronomist had warned against in 1 Sam 8:11-18, so much so that the people did indeed, "cry out in that day because of your king"⁸ (v.18); "Your father [Solomon] made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." (1 Kgs 12:4) Divine displeasure with Solomon was such that the kingdom was divided by rebellion as soon as his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne. Finally we note that the amount of wealth acquired by Solomon in one year of trading;

"The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold" (1 Kgs 10:14)

The number six is constantly associated with Solomon's reign and used to describe his trading, his throne, his chariot, his decorations (1 Kgs 10; 16, 19, 20, 29); we are left in no doubt that his promising reign, that began with the privilege of being a "Son of God" ended with Solomon as the "Son of Adam." Solomon's reign was

(Wiener Beitrage zur Theologie, 13; Vienna: Herder, 1966). This view was adumbrated by some Jewish interpreters who saw in the 'sons of God' rulers and in the 'daughters of men' women of lower rank (see Dexinger, Göttersöhne, pp. 122-24, 129-20; Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis', pp. 61, 64-66)." David J. A. Clines, The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6.1-4) in the Context of the 'Primaeval History' (Genesis 11): *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967-1998*, Volume 1 (JSOTSup, 292; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998., 88-94), fn10

⁸ Unlike, Saul this was not a king that "they had chosen" nevertheless Solomon fulfilled all the negative attributes of oppressive kingship. Notice also that "crying out" to God is what the Israelite slaves did in Egypt.

debilitated by compromise leading to apostasy and self-glorification. Solomon's divine wisdom had degenerated into perverse human wisdom.⁹

Jesus and Solomon

When Jesus mentions Solomon it is by way of comparison and contrast. The “lilies” are arrayed with more “glory” than Solomon (Matt 6:29//Lk 12:27) and a “greater” than Solomon is present (Matt 12:42//Lk 11:31) to dispense judgment (the eschatological judgment). The sayings are neutral and cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of Solomon, merely as a reference to his past “glory” and his “greatness” (juridical wisdom), which were ultimately both compromised and temporary in nature (unlike that of Christ cf. John 17:5; 5:22). Only the commencement of Solomon's reign realizes a functional messianic typology, particularly when the queen of Sheba is introduced, thereafter it rapidly deteriorates.

Conclusion

“Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people: “The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of *his righteousness* in the day that he sins.” ” (Ezek 33:12)

Although it is not for us to judge “another man's servant”, we should be careful in asserting that Solomon repented and refrain from holding him as a paragon of virtue when Scripture is at the very least ambivalent towards his reign. Moreover,

⁹ **Revelation 13:18** Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666. (Note: the context is economic sanctions adopted by a despot)

we should hesitate at the unchallenged acceptance of attributing Solomonic authorship to Ecclesiastes and Songs, especially when other explanations have greater if not equal plausibility.